SECOND ALCIBIADES

Alcibiades, full of ambition, encounters Socrates, who engages him in conversation and makes him realize how little he understands of what he needs to understand; at the end Alcibiades is humiliated and begs Socrates to be his teacher and lover. To this schematic extent Second Alcibiades *tells the same story as the* Alcibiades *also preserved in the Platonic corpus. Certain other parallels suggest that the author of* Second Alcibiades *adapted* Alcibiades*: 141a–b ≈ 105a–c; 145b–c ≈ 107d–108a. But perhaps the similarities between the two dialogues are to be explained by their common derivation from the celebrated* Alcibiades *of Aeschines of Sphettus, or from one of the other dialogues called* Alcibiades*. We cannot determine this question, because Aeschines' dialogue survives only in fragments, and the* Alcibiades *dialogues of Euclides and Antisthenes, other students of Socrates and writers of Socratic dialogues, are lost.*

In most respects Socrates in Second Alcibiades *is a figure familiar from other Socratic literature. He uses analogies taken from humble occupations; he argues that sometimes ignorance is better than knowledge; he argues that the only truly valuable knowledge is the knowledge of the good, an authoritative knowledge that will correctly advise us when to use the other goods and skills in our possession; he believes that the gods hold the virtues of the soul in higher regard than expensive gifts and sacrifices. Most important is the main theme of the dialogue: Socrates argues that it would be better not to pray for anything in particular, so fallible is our human knowledge of what is good for us; best would be to follow the example of the Spartans, who simply pray to the gods for what is good and what is noble. This coheres well with what is known of Socrates' view of prayer (cf. Xenophon's* Memoirs of Socrates *I.iii.2).*

But the author of Second Alcibiades *seems also to be writing against a different branch of the Socratic legacy, Cynicism. The Cynics regarded all ignorance as madness, whereas Socrates in* Second Alcibiades *takes care to distinguish madmen from people with lesser forms of ignorance. The latter he calls fools and asses, or (euphemistically) innocent, naive, simple, or even bighearted (*megalopsychos*). Why does the author use this word?* Megalopsychia*, the ability to rise above and be unaffected by the events in life that are normally thought to be bad—pain, poverty, bad treatment by other people, and so on—was a cardinal virtue for the Cynics. But here Socrates applies the term to people who stupidly don't know or care about what's good for them (140c, 150c). This curious negative connotation of* megalopsychia*—not found elsewhere in*

ancient Greek—is another sign that Second Alcibiades *is arguing against the Cynics.*

The author of Second Alcibiades *had a notable predilection (shared with Plato, but with few of the other authors in the Platonic corpus) to quote and adapt Greek poetry. Certain features of his language tell us that he came from Northern Greece and suggest that he wrote in the third century* B.C., *but the evidence is not strong and the dialogue might well date from the end of the fourth century* B.C.

D.S.H.

SOCRATES: Alcibiades, are you on your way to say your prayers? 138

ALCIBIADES: Yes, indeed, Socrates.

SOCRATES: You have a depressed and downcast look; you seem preoccupied.

ALCIBIADES: And what might preoccupy me, Socrates?

SOCRATES: The most serious of all questions, in my view. Tell me, in b
God's name, what you think. In public and private prayer we make requests to the gods: don't they sometimes grant some of them and not all of them, and don't they say yes to some people and no to others?

ALCIBIADES: Indeed they do.

SOCRATES: So don't you agree that there is a great need for caution, for fear you might, all unawares, be praying for great evils when you think you are asking for great goods? Suppose the gods were in a mood to give whatever was asked; it might be just like the case of Oedipus who blurted out the prayer that his sons might take arms to settle their inheritance.[1] c
He could have prayed for relief from the ills which beset him without begging for others in addition! But in fact, what he asked for came to pass, with many terrible consequences which there is no need to enumerate.

ALCIBIADES: But you're talking about a madman, Socrates: do you think any person of sound mind would have dared to make such a prayer?

SOCRATES: Do you take madness to be the opposite of wisdom?

ALCIBIADES: Yes, indeed.

SOCRATES: Do you think there are some people who are wise and some d
who are stupid?

ALCIBIADES: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Well, then, let's see which are which. We have agreed that there are some people who are stupid, some who are wise, and others who are mad.

ALCIBIADES: Agreed.

Translated by Anthony Kenny.

1. Socrates refers to *The Thebans* (frg. 2 Davies), an epic poem in the style of Homer about the travails of unfortunate King Oedipus of Thebes and his family. Oedipus' prayer was granted—and his sons killed one another.

SOCRATES: Are there some people who are healthy?
ALCIBIADES: Yes.
SOCRATES: And others who are sick?
139 ALCIBIADES: Indeed.
SOCRATES: Not the same people?
ALCIBIADES: Of course not.
SOCRATES: Are there any other people who are neither one thing nor the other?
ALCIBIADES: No.
SOCRATES: Because a person has to be either sick or not sick?
ALCIBIADES: That's what I think.
SOCRATES: Well now, do you have the same view about wisdom and stupidity?
ALCIBIADES: How do you mean?
SOCRATES: Do you think it is only possible either to be wise or stupid,
b or is there also a third state in between in which a person is neither wise nor stupid?
ALCIBIADES: No, there isn't.
SOCRATES: So you have to be one or the other?
ALCIBIADES: So I believe.
SOCRATES: Now do you remember that you agreed that madness is the opposite of wisdom?
ALCIBIADES: Yes, I did.
SOCRATES: And that there is no third state in which a person is neither wise nor stupid?
ALCIBIADES: Yes.
SOCRATES: And can one thing have two distinct opposites?
ALCIBIADES: No.
c SOCRATES: So it looks as if stupidity and madness are one and the same thing.
ALCIBIADES: It does.
SOCRATES: So would it be correct to say that all stupid people are mad—not just any of your contemporaries who are stupid, as some of them certainly are, but even older people? Tell me, in God's name, don't you think that in our city the wise are in a minority, and most people are stupid, or, as you would say, mad?
ALCIBIADES: I do.
d SOCRATES: But do you think we could live comfortably in a city of so many madmen? Would we not have met our fate long ago, and been punched and beaten and subjected to every madman's trick? Things aren't quite like that, are they?
ALCIBIADES: No, not at all; it looks as if I've not got the matter quite right.
SOCRATES: I don't think so either. Try looking at it another way.
ALCIBIADES: What way do you mean?
SOCRATES: I'll tell you. We take it that some people are sick, don't we?

ALCIBIADES: Yes, indeed.

SOCRATES: Do you think that anyone who is sick must necessarily have e
gout, or fever, or eye ache? Or can a person be sick in some other way
without having any of these? Surely there are many other diseases be-
sides these?

ALCIBIADES: Surely.

SOCRATES: Eye ache is always a sickness, don't you think?

ALCIBIADES: Yes.

SOCRATES: But is sickness always eye ache?

ALCIBIADES: No; but I'm not sure what to say.

SOCRATES: But if you pay attention to me, we may find out; for two heads 140
are better than one.

ALCIBIADES: I am paying attention, Socrates, as well as I can.

SOCRATES: Well, we have agreed that while eye ache is always a sickness,
not every sickness is eye ache, have we not?

ALCIBIADES: Yes, we have.

SOCRATES: And rightly. Anyone with a fever is sick, but not everyone
who is sick has a fever—nor gout, I take it, nor eye ache. Each of these is b
a disease, but they present quite different symptoms, to use the doctors'
term. They are not all alike, and they do not have like effects; each of them
works according to its own nature, but they are all none the less diseases.
Similarly, we classify some people as workmen, don't we?

ALCIBIADES: Of course.

SOCRATES: There are shoemakers, and carpenters, and sculptors, and very
many others whom we needn't enumerate. They all have their own share
of work, and they are all workmen; but they are not all carpenters or c
shoemakers or sculptors even though they are all workmen.

ALCIBIADES: No.

SOCRATES: Well now, in the same way people have shared out stupidity
among themselves; those who have the largest share we call madmen,
those with a smaller share we call fools or asses. People who prefer euphe-
misms call them big-hearted or simple, or perhaps innocent, naive, or d
dumb: you will come across many other names if you look for them. But
all these things are stupidity, and differ from each other in the way one
kind of work and one kind of disease differs from another. Isn't that right?

ALCIBIADES: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: Let's go back, then. At the beginning of our discussion we set
out to discover which people were wise and which were stupid, because
we had agreed that some were one and some were the other.

ALCIBIADES: We had indeed.

SOCRATES: Is it your view that the wise are those who know what should e
be done and said?

ALCIBIADES: Yes.

SOCRATES: And who are the stupid? Those who know neither of these
things?

ALCIBIADES: Just so.

SOCRATES: And those who know neither of these things will say and do what they ought not, without knowing that this is what they are saying and doing?

ALCIBIADES: So it seems.

141 SOCRATES: And just such a person—I said—was Oedipus. And in our own time you will find many such people—not in a rage as he was—who pray for things that are bad for them in the belief that they are good for them. He did not think so, or pray so; but there are others who are in a very different case. Suppose that the god to whom you are about to pray were to appear to you and ask you, before you began praying, whether you would be happy to be sole ruler of the city of Athens—or, if that b seemed mean and tiny, were to offer you all the Greeks as well—or, if he saw that you regarded that too as insignificant unless the whole of Europe were included, were to promise you all of that plus simultaneous acknowledgment by the whole human race of the rule of Alcibiades son of Clinias. If that happened, I imagine, you would go home very happy and think you had come into possession of the greatest of goods.

ALCIBIADES: So would anyone else, I imagine, Socrates, if he were given the same promise.

c SOCRATES: But you would not give your own life in exchange for the territory and sole rule of all the Greeks and all the barbarians?

ALCIBIADES: I should think not, since they would be no use to me.

SOCRATES: But suppose you were going to use them, but were going to make a bad and harmful use of them? Would you want them then?

ALCIBIADES: No.

SOCRATES: So you see, it is not safe to accept without thinking what one d is given, nor to pray for something which is going to injure one or take away one's life altogether. We could name many people who set their hearts on obtaining sole rulership, and strove to achieve this goal as a great good, and then had their lives taken by plotters against their rule. I think you are not unaware of the events of the last few days: Archelaus of Macedon was in love with a man whose love for Archelaus' kingship was greater than Archelaus' love for him, and who killed his lover in order e to make himself a king and a happy man. He had only ruled for three or four days when he in his turn fell victim to a plot and was killed himself.

Among our own citizens too—as we know not just by hearsay, but as 142 eye-witnesses—we see some who have longed to command armies, and having got what they wanted are now exiled from the city or have lost their lives altogether. And even those who seem to have done best have lived amidst dangers and fears; not only during their campaigns, but when they have returned home where they have been besieged by informers as tightly as they were by the enemy, so that some of them wished to heaven b that they had stayed privates rather than generals. Of course, it would make some sense if these dangers and burdens brought any benefit; but in fact it's quite the contrary.

You will find the same in the matter of children: some people pray to have them, and when they have them they bring them utter disaster and grief. Some people's children are so thoroughly bad that they make their whole life a misery; other people have good children and lose them in c
some calamity and end up no less miserable than the others, wishing they had never had children at all.

However, in spite of all these and similar dire examples, you rarely find anyone who declines a gift or who refrains from praying for what he hopes to be granted. Most people, if given the chance to become a ruler or a general, or any of the other things which bring more harm than good, will d
not hesitate to take the opportunity; and they will even pray for such things before they are on offer. After a while, however, they change their tune and pray away their former prayers.

I wonder, then, if humans are not wrong in "placing the blame" for their ills on the gods, when "they themselves by their own presumption"—or stupidity, should we say?—"have brought sorrows on themselves beyond their destined lot."[2] There was a poet who composed a prayer for e
all his friends to say in common, more or less like this:

> *King Zeus, whether we pray or not, give us what is good for us* 143
> *What is bad for us, give us not, however hard we pray for it.*[3]

He certainly seems to have been a wise man: I expect he had stupid friends whom he had seen working and praying for things that it was better for them not to have, no matter what they thought. That is what he recommended, and in my view he spoke well and soundly; but if you have anything against what he said, speak up.

ALCIBIADES: It is hard, Socrates, to speak against what has been well spoken. One thing I do observe is that the cause of very many human evils is ignorance: it is ignorance which deceives us into doing and—what b
is worse—praying for the greatest evils. No one, however, thinks thus about himself; each of us thinks himself quite capable of praying not for the worst but for the best. For such a prayer would really seem to be more like a curse than a prayer!

SOCRATES: Well said! But perhaps someone even wiser than you and I might say that we were wrong to blame ignorance in such general terms; c
we should specify what it is ignorance *of*. Indeed, just as ignorance is an evil to some people, there are other people, in certain states, to whom it is a good.

ALCIBIADES: How do you mean? Can there be anything of which it is better for people to have ignorance than knowledge, no matter what state they are in?

2. Socrates adapts *Odyssey* i.32–34.

3. An epigram in the *Palatine Anthology*, X.108, modified.

SOCRATES: I think there can; don't you?

ALCIBIADES: No, I don't; not on your life.

SOCRATES: But surely I am not to judge that you would ever want to
d commit against your mother crimes like those of Orestes and Alcmaeon[4] and anyone else like them?

ALCIBIADES: Spare me, for God's sake, Socrates!

SOCRATES: It isn't the person who says that you would not ever want to behave like that whom you should ask to spare you, but rather anyone who contradicted him; for the act seems to you so horrendous that you do not like to hear it spoken of even by way of example. But do you think that Orestes, if he had been of sound mind and known what was best for him to do, would have dared to commit any such crime?

ALCIBIADES: No, I don't.

e SOCRATES: Nor, I think, would anyone else.

ALCIBIADES: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: It seems then that it is ignorance of the best, failing to know what is best, that is a bad thing.

ALCIBIADES: So it seems.

SOCRATES: And not only for the person himself, but also for everyone else?

ALCIBIADES: I agree.

SOCRATES: Let's consider a further point. Suppose the thought sprang into your mind that it would be an excellent thing to kill your friend and mentor Pericles,[5] and you took a dagger and went to his door and asked
144 if he were at home, with the intention of killing him and him alone, and they said he was at home. I don't mean to say that you would wish to do any such thing; but just suppose that you were to think that the worst thing was the best thing—that's a thought that might at any time occur to someone who is ignorant of what is really best—or don't you think so?

ALCIBIADES: Absolutely.

b SOCRATES: Well then, if you went inside and saw Pericles, but did not recognize him and thought he was someone else, would you still go on to kill him?

ALCIBIADES: I should think not, in God's name.

SOCRATES: For your intention surely was to kill not just anyone you came across, but only that particular person. Isn't that right?

ALCIBIADES: Yes.

SOCRATES: And if, having tried several times, you always failed, when it came to the point, to recognize Pericles, you would never lay a hand on him.

ALCIBIADES: Certainly not.

4. According to legend, they murdered their mothers to avenge the deaths of their fathers.

5. Alcibiades' father died early and left his two sons in the care of Pericles, the most influential Athenian politician of the mid-fifth century.

SOCRATES: Well then, do you think that Orestes would ever have laid a hand on his mother if he had failed to recognize her?

ALCIBIADES: I don't think so. c

SOCRATES: For presumably he too had no intention of killing the first woman he came across, or killing just anyone's mother, but only his own.

ALCIBIADES: That's right.

SOCRATES: Then for those in that state, with such intentions, these are things which it is better not to know.

ALCIBIADES: Very likely.

SOCRATES: So you see that there are some things which, for certain people in certain states, it is better not to know than to know.

ALCIBIADES: So it seems.

SOCRATES: Now if you care to look at what follows from this, you may d find that you're in for a surprise.

ALCIBIADES: What surprise, Socrates?

SOCRATES: I mean that, in general, it seems that if someone lacks knowledge of what is best, the possession of other skills will only rarely help, but in most cases will harm, their possessor. Consider it this way. When we are about to say or do something, mustn't we first of all know, or at least believe we know, what we are so keen to say and do? e

ALCIBIADES: I believe so.

SOCRATES: Orators, for instance, are bound to know, or at least to think they know, how to give us advice on various topics—whether it is about war and peace, or about the construction of walls or the equipment of harbors. Altogether, whatever a state does in foreign or domestic matters 145 is done on the advice of the orators.

ALCIBIADES: As you say.

SOCRATES: See then what follows.

ALCIBIADES: If I can.

SOCRATES: You call some people wise and others stupid?

ALCIBIADES: I do.

SOCRATES: And you call most people stupid, and a few wise?

ALCIBIADES: Exactly.

SOCRATES: In each case you make use of a criterion?

ALCIBIADES: Yes.

SOCRATES: Well, do you call a man wise who knows how to give advice, b but not what advice is best to give or when it is best to give it?

ALCIBIADES: Certainly not.

SOCRATES: Nor, I imagine, a man who knows how to make war, without knowing when or for how long war should best be made? Isn't that right?

ALCIBIADES: Yes.

SOCRATES: Nor again a man who knows how to kill or steal or banish people without knowing when it is better to do this, or to whom?

ALCIBIADES: No.

c SOCRATES: So what we want is the person who knows one or other of these things but also has the knowledge of what is best—which no doubt is the same as knowledge of utility.

ALCIBIADES: Yes.

SOCRATES: And this is the person whom we shall call wise, a reliable counsellor for himself and for the state. But someone who is not like this we shall call the opposite. What do you think?

ALCIBIADES: I agree.

SOCRATES: Now suppose we have a person who knows how to ride or
d shoot, or box, or wrestle, or compete in any other sport or exhibit any other skill. What do you call the person who knows how best to exercise a particular skill? If it is the skill of riding, I expect you will call him a good rider.

ALCIBIADES: I will.

SOCRATES: And if it is boxing, you will call him a good boxer, and if it is flute-playing you will call him a good flute-player, and so in other cases. Or do you disagree?

ALCIBIADES: No, not at all.

SOCRATES: Now do you think that knowing about these things suffices
e to make a person wise, or is more needed?

ALCIBIADES: Much more, upon my life.

SOCRATES: Suppose there were a state in which there were good archers and flute-players, good athletes and craftsmen, and among them the kind of people we have been talking about, who know only how to make war and only how to kill, and also fine orators who know how to sound off about politics, but none of them had the knowledge of what is best, and
146 none of them knew when or on whom it was better for them to exercise their skills—what sort of state do you think that would be?

ALCIBIADES: A miserable one, Socrates.

SOCRATES: I'm sure you would if you saw them all competing with each other for honors, "each one assigning precedence in political matters to his own sphere of excellence"[6]—I mean, what is best according to the scope of his own skill—while he may be much mistaken about what is best for the state and for himself, since he has not used his intelligence
b but put his trust in mere seeming. If that's the situation, wouldn't we be right to describe such a state as a hotbed of dissension and lawlessness?

ALCIBIADES: Indeed we would.

SOCRATES: Did we not think that if you are on the point of saying or doing something, you must first know, or at least think you know what you are doing or saying?

ALCIBIADES: We did.

SOCRATES: So if someone does what he knows, or thinks he knows, and
c has in addition knowledge of utility, we will judge him a boon both to the state and to himself?

6. Socrates adapts some lines from Euripides' *Antiope* (frg. 183 Nauck[2]).

ALCIBIADES: Absolutely.

SOCRATES: But if he does the contrary, he will be no good to the state or to himself?

ALCIBIADES: No good.

SOCRATES: Well, then: are you still of the same mind, or have you changed it?

ALCIBIADES: Still the same.

SOCRATES: You said that you called most people stupid, and only a few wise?

ALCIBIADES: I did.

SOCRATES: So, to repeat, most people have been mistaken about what is best because they have not used their intelligence but put their trust in mere seeming.

ALCIBIADES: Yes. d

SOCRATES: For most people, then, it is an advantage neither to know nor to think they know anything, if they are going to do themselves more harm than good by rushing to do what they know or think they know.

ALCIBIADES: Very true.

SOCRATES: So you see it seems that I was quite right when I said that it looked as if other skills, if not combined with the knowledge of what is e best, are more often than not harmful to their possessors.

ALCIBIADES: I may not have thought so then, but I do now, Socrates.

SOCRATES: So if the life of a soul or a state is to go aright, this knowledge of what is best must be embraced with exactly the kind of trust a patient has in his doctor or a seafarer in his good ship's captain. For without this, the stronger the winds of fortune blow towards the acquisition of wealth 147 or health and strength or anything else of that kind, the greater the errors to which these things will necessarily lead. Someone may have acquired so many skills as to deserve the name of polymath, but if he lets himself be led by one or other of these skills and lacks this true knowledge he will, as he indeed deserves, run into very rough weather, "alone on the b high seas with no helmsman and with not long to live." There is a verse which fits his case, where the poet complains of someone that "he knew a lot of things but knew them all wrong."[7]

ALCIBIADES: Whatever has that verse got to do with the matter, Socrates? It does not seem at all to the point.

SOCRATES: It is very much to the point; but you are right that he speaks enigmatically, just like a poet. All poetry, by its nature, is enigmatic, and not everyone can take it in; but when, in addition, it is housed in a poet c who is miserly and wishes so far as possible to conceal rather than exhibit his wisdom, it may be quite remarkably difficult to find out what each of them might mean. For you don't think that Homer, the divinest and wisest of poets—for it is he who says that Margites knew a lot of things but knew d

7. Socrates quotes from the mock epic *Margites* (frg. 3 Allen), which was generally (but incorrectly) attributed to Homer in the ancient world.

them all wrong—didn't know that it was impossible to know a thing wrong. He is riddling, I think; he meant "wrong" as an adjective, not as an adverb; and he meant "to know" rather than "knew." So, if we forget about the original meter we can put together his meaning as this: he knew a lot of things, but it was wrong for him to know them all. Clearly, if it was wrong for him to know a lot of things, he must have been a bad man, if we are to trust our previous arguments.

e ALCIBIADES: I agree Socrates; if we cannot trust these arguments I really don't know which ones we can trust.

SOCRATES: You are right to think so.

ALCIBIADES: But perhaps I should think again.

SOCRATES: Oh, for God's sake! You see what a terrible great muddle we are in, and it is partly your fault; for you change incessantly from side to side. No sooner are you convinced of something than you give it up again
148 and change your mind. Well, if the god to whom you are on your way should appear to you at this very moment, before you start praying, and ask whether you would be happy to get one of the things we spoke of earlier, or whether he should leave the choice of prayer to you, which do you think offers the best prospect: accepting his offers or making your own prayer?

ALCIBIADES: By the gods, Socrates, I would have to take time to answer
b your question; an impromptu response would be folly. You really have to take a great deal of care to make sure that you are not, all unawares, praying for evil in the belief that it is good, and that after a little while you won't, as you said a moment ago, change your tune and call back all your prayers.

SOCRATES: That poet I mentioned at the beginning of our discussion, who told us to pray to be saved from the evils we pray for—he was wiser than us, wasn't he?

ALCIBIADES: I guess so.

SOCRATES: Whether in admiration of this poet, or because they have
c worked it out for themselves, the Spartans take the same course in their public and private prayers. They pray the gods to give them first what is good and then what is noble; no one ever hears them asking anything more. They have not, so far, been any less fortunate in consequence than any other people; and even if they have not invariably enjoyed good
d fortune it has not been because of their prayers. Whether we are given what we pray for or the reverse is in the lap of the gods.

I would like to tell you another story which I once heard from some of my elders. There was a quarrel between the Athenians and the Spartans, and whenever there was a battle, whether by land or sea, our city always came off worse and could never win a victory. The Athenians took this
e hard, and cast about to discover how they could find relief from their troubles. After discussion they decided to send a delegation to consult Ammon,[8] to ask in particular why the gods granted victory to the Spartans

8. An Egyptian god with an oracle in the Libyan desert.

rather than themselves. "We" they said "offer more and finer sacrifices than the rest of the Greeks, and we surpass all others in adorning the temples with emblems, and every year we organize for the gods' benefit the most solemn and sumptuous processions, spending more money than 149
all the other Greeks put together. But the Spartans have never taken any such pains, and they are so mean to the gods that they regularly sacrifice blemished animals and fall well behind us in the quality of their worship, in spite of being no less wealthy than ourselves." Having said that, they also asked what they should do to be relieved from the evils that beset them. The prophet, no doubt under divine instruction, called them to him b
and said simply this. "Thus saith Ammon to the Athenians: I prefer the terse Laconic utterance to all the sacrifices of the Greeks." That was all he said; not a word more. By their "terse utterance" I expect the god meant their prayer, for it is indeed very different from other prayers. Other Greeks c
offer bulls with gilded horns, and others present the gods with votive emblems, and pray for whatever comes into their heads, good or bad. But when the gods hear their profanities they scorn these magnificent processions and sacrifices. We should, I believe, be very careful and cautious when we consider what should be said and what should not.

In Homer you will find other similar stories. He tells how the Trojans, d
when they pitched camp, "sacrificed to the immortals perfect hecatombs" and how

> *The winds carried the delicious smell from the plain up to heaven.*
> *But the blessed gods took none of it, and had no pleasure in it;*
> *So deep was their hatred of holy Ilium, and Priam,* e
> *And the people of Priam of the ashen spear.*[9]

So it was no help to them to sacrifice and offer vain gifts, when they were out of favor with the gods. For I don't imagine that it is like the gods to be swayed by gifts, like some low moneylender; we make ourselves sound very silly when we boast that we do better than the Spartans on this score.

It would be a strange and sorry thing if the gods took more account of our gifts and sacrifices than of our souls and whether there is holiness and justice to be found in them. Yes, that is what they care about, I believe, 150
far more than about these extravagant processions and sacrifices offered year by year by states and individuals who may, for all we know, have sinned greatly against gods and men. The gods are not venal, and scorn all these things, as Ammon and his prophet told us. Gods and men of sound mind are more likely to hold justice and wisdom in especial honor; b
and none are wise and just but those who know how to behave and speak to gods and men. But now I would like to hear what your opinion may be about all this.

9. Cf. *Iliad* viii.548–52.

ALCIBIADES: No different from yours and the god's, Socrates; it would hardly be fitting for me to take sides against the god.

SOCRATES: But you remember that you said you were very worried that
c without knowing it you might pray for evil, thinking it to be good?

ALCIBIADES: I do.

SOCRATES: You see, then, how dangerous it is for you to go to pray to the god, in case he hears you speaking amiss, rejects your sacrifice altogether, and perhaps adds some further penalty. I think you would do best to hold your peace; for I expect you are rather too big-hearted (to use the
d favorite euphemism for stupidity) to be willing to use the Laconian prayer. It takes time to learn how to behave towards gods and men.

ALCIBIADES: How long will it take, Socrates, and who will teach me? I would very much like to see the man who could do it.

SOCRATES: It is the man who has his eye on you. But you remember how
e Homer says that Athena took away the fog from the eyes of Diomedes, "so that he could clearly see both god and man."[10] You too need to get rid of the fog which is wrapped around your soul, so as to prepare you to receive the means of telling good from evil. At present I don't think you could do so.

ALCIBIADES: Let him remove the fog, or whatever else it is; I am prepared to do whatever he tells me, whoever he may be, so long as it will make me better.

151 SOCRATES: He too is more than anxious to help.

ALCIBIADES: Then I think it is better to put off the sacrifice for the time being.

SOCRATES: You're quite right; it is much safer than running such a big risk.

ALCIBIADES: Here's an idea, Socrates; I'll put this garland on *your* head,
b for giving me such good advice. Only when there comes the day of which you have spoken will we give the gods their garlands and their customary dues. God willing, that day will not be too far off.

SOCRATES: I am glad to accept, and I look forward to seeing myself receiving other gifts from you. In Euripides' play, when Creon sees Tiresias crowned with garlands and learns that he has been given them by the enemy as trophies to reward his skill, he says

> *Good as an omen are your victor's wreaths*
> *For we, you know, are battered by the waves.*[11]

c Just so, I regard the honor you have paid me as a good omen. For I am just as tempest-tossed as Creon, and I look forward to victory over your lovers.

10. Cf. *Iliad* v.127–28.

11. *Phoenician Women* 858–59.